

APOCALYPSE NOW: ZOROASTRIAN REFLECTIONS ON THE EARLY ISLAMIC CENTURIES

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Although Middle Persian apocalyptic texts were redacted during the Muslim era, they have rarely been used as historical sources for the early Islamic period. While the texts do not give detailed chronological information, they do present the Zoroastrian community's reflection on the conquest and the sectarian and political developments of that era. Further they present information that cannot be ascertained from other sources regarding the view of the native population of the plateau, especially the Zoroastrians. This is important, since there seems to have been a large number of Zoroastrians until the ninth and tenth centuries and it was only then that there appears to have been a high rate of conversion.¹

What the apocalyptic texts predict is simply an internalization and the framing of current events, written by the author followed by an end of time scenario. When looking at the texts, at once it becomes clear that we are not dealing with apocalyptic stories but with contemporary political events embedded in this genre of semi-literary historical works. Apocalyptic literature appears in situations of hardship and fear. This type of situation could emerge when the social organization, including access to central power is cut off and the group is jeopardized, especially when the cultural pattern of a society is at risk or in danger from an external force.² This holds true for the Zoroastrians when we would think of the Arab Muslim conquest, the Abbāsī revolution, sectarian revolts, and provincial uprisings as recorded in these texts. What needs to be done is to identify these events within the texts, which would provide clues as to the view of the Zoroastrians regarding these events and their importance for that community. To demonstrate the usefulness of these texts, here it is intended to study three historical episodes reflected in Middle Persian apocalyptic literature. The first, reflecting

¹ R. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: an Essay in Quantitative History*, Harvard University Press, (Massachusetts and London, England, 1979) 23.

² T. Olsson, "The Apocalyptic Activity. The Case of Jāmāsp Nāmag," *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, ed. D. Hellholm, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) (Tübingen, 1983) 31.

on the conquest of Iran in the seventh century and social and religious interaction between the conquerors and the conquered; secondly the reaction of the Zoroastrian community to the Abbāsī revolution and the downfall of the Marwānīs; and the thirdly, a sectarian revolt, namely that of the Khorrāmiyya which made a great impression on the priestly scribes of the Middle Persian texts.

While we can guess as to how the Zoroastrian community would react to the Arab Muslim conquest of the Sāsānian empire, in regard to the Abbāsī revolution and sectarian revolts interesting information is gained. Although it has been the norm to see the Abbāsī revolution and sectarian movements of the eastern caliphate, such as that of Bābak Khorram-dēn in the early Islamic period as “national” uprisings against the Arab Muslim invaders, and the assertion of Iranian dynasties, the Middle Persian texts testify to the contrary. The Zoroastrian “orthodoxy”³ for its part, detested such sectarian movements as Bābak Khorram-dēn and the Surkh-Jāmagān (Muḥammira). The reason for this is simple, and that is that they were not “orthodox” Zoroastrians, and thus by their very nature would contribute to *ag-dēnīh* (evil religiosity) and *ahlāmoyīh* (heresy) and in no possible way could they be beneficial to the religion and community solidarity. Zoroastrian communal identity had already been formed under the Sāsānians, and had been solidified in reaction to the Arab Muslim conquest. The redaction of most of the Middle Persian texts in the early Islamic period further solidified the teachings of the Zoroastrian religion for the community and the dwindling number of priests. What is important is that there are a good number of apocalyptic texts written in Middle Persian, and while the time predicted for the end of the world never arrived, the priests kept on copying them and some even translated them into New Persian until recent times.

The parameters of information provided by apocalyptic texts have been enumerated by Paul J. Alexander.⁴ As he has noted, these sources can elaborate or corroborate historical facts; they can reveal information regarding the reaction of groups to historical events, their judgments on the course of history, and finally their hopes and fears for the future.⁵ The appearance of this genre of literature in the early Islamic period also reveals what Alexander calls “eschatological pressures.”⁶ This is interesting in itself since it not only expresses the reaction of the Zoroastrians to historical events, but it also coincides with Muslim and other religious communities’ apocalyptic expectations

³ By orthodoxy here is meant the religion espoused by the redactors of the ninth and tenth century Middle Persian texts.

⁴ Paul J. Alexander, “Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. LXXIII, Number 4, April (1968), 997-1018.

⁵ Alexander, *ibid.*, 998.

⁶ Alexander, *ibid.*, 1002.

in this period. This may hint that the eighth and the ninth centuries were a period of extreme eschatological pressure.

The basic structure of Zoroastrian apocalypticism in Middle Persian texts is that before the world becomes renovated, (Middle Persian) *fraša*, for a time the world would go through certain hardships and disasters.⁷ While there has been much discussion regarding the authenticity of Zoroastrian apocalypticism,⁸ the question that concerns us here is how these texts describe historical events, especially the early Islamic centuries.⁹ The texts present the future apocalyptic scenario by having Zoroaster, the prophet ask questions and *Ohrmazd*, God, give the answers. This method of dialogue, which has its precedents in the Avesta, gave more authority to these texts since it is the word of God that passed to the prophet. The Lord, *Ohrmazd*, recounts the eras of justice and hardships within the framework of Sāsānian history and historiography. This means that history begins as enumerated in the sacred text, the Avesta, where it begins with the Sāsānian's ancestors, the Pešdādīāns and Kēyāniāns, the Iranian dynasties par excellence.¹⁰ Then the focus shifts to the Sāsānians, and then the Arab Muslim invasion and sectarian movements which is the ultimate era of disorder which brings about the end of world. This last epoch, the period of disorder, begins with the Arab Muslim conquest of the Iranian plateau. In the *Jāmāsp Nāmag*, king Wištasp, the Kēyānian sovereign asks his minister Jāmāsp to predict the future of *Ērān-šahr* (the domain of the Iranians) and the answer is:

Ērān-šahr ō tazīgān abespārēnd ud tazīgān
har rōz nērōgtar bawēnd ud šahr šahr frāz gīrand

Iran will come to the Muslims and the Muslims will grow stronger daily
and will seize (Iran) city by city.¹¹

This episode presents the Arab Muslim encroachment onto the plateau, from province to province. We know that by the end of the Sāsānian dynasty, because of the reforms of Kawād I and his son, Xusrō I, the *Dehgāns* and local governors had much power and that it was they who were the ones

⁷ T. Daryaee, "Zoroastrian Eschatology According to Middle Persian Texts," *Critique and Vision, An Afghan Journal of Politics, Culture & History*, Vol. 1, Spring (1995), 5-23.

⁸ For the latest study see N. Cohen, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come. The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith*, (New Haven and London, 1993).

⁹ For a survey of the texts and the question of the authenticity of the texts see Mary Boyce, "On the Antiquity of Zoroastrian Apocalyptic," *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. XLVII, Part i, (1984), 57-76.

¹⁰ T. Daryaee, "Keyanid History or National History? The Nature of Sasanid Zoroastrian Historiography," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 28, Numbers 3-4, Summer/Fall (1995), 129-141.

¹¹ Beside certain emendations see, Harold W. Bailey, "To The Zamasp-Namak. I," *Bulletin of the Society of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. VI, Part I, (1930), 55; G. Messina, *Libro Apocalittico Persiano Ayātkār I Žāmāspik*, Pontificio Istituto Biblico, (Rome, 1939), 66.

who made treaties with the Muslim conquerors and capitulated to pay (Middle Persian) *gazīdag* > (Arabic) *jizya* “poll-tax” in return for safety. Another passage in the *Īmāšp Nāmag* illuminates this fact:

pad abēdādīh ēn Ērān-šahr ō dahibedān bār ī garān rasēd

because of lawlessness, this Iran will come as a heavy burden to the governors of the provinces.¹²

Of course there is nothing new in these texts as regards the conquest, but they do corroborate assumptions about the early Islamic conquests. What is more interesting is that the texts hint at the settlement and co-existence of the invaders which seems to have been a greater travesty in the opinion of the priestly writers. The same text describes the Arab Muslim settlement in the Iranian plateau in this manner (*Īmāšp Nāmag* 12-13):

ud hamāg Ērān-šahr ō dast ī awēšān dušmenān
rasēd ud anērān ud Ērān gumēzihēnd ēdōn kū ērīh
az anērīh paydāg nē bawēd ān ī ēr abāz anērīh ēstēnd

and all of Iran will fall to the hands of those enemies, and non-Iranians and Iranians will be confounded in such a way that Iranianess will not be distinguishable from non-Iranianess, (and) those who are Iranians will turn back on non-Iranian ways.¹³

This is not unusual when considering how the conquered viewed the conquerors, and the text simply describes the taking of provinces one after another and the local governors having a difficult time controlling their provinces, and then the eventual settlement of the Arab Muslims which led to co-existence.¹⁴ In another Middle Persian text, the *Bundahišn*, the account is more historical (Chapter XXXIII 20-22):

ud ka xwadāyīh ō Yazdgird mad 20 sāl xwadāyīh kard adān
tāzīgān pad was maragīh ō Ērān dvarīsthend Yazdgird pad
kārezār abāg ōyšān nē škuftan ō Xwarāsān ud Turkestan šud
asp ud mard ayārīh xwāst ušān ānōh ōzad pus ī Yazdgird ō
Hindūgān šud spāh gund āwurdan ud pēš az āmadan ōy
Xwarāsān ōzad ud ān spāh ud gund wišuft Ērān-šahr pad
tāzīgān mānd ud ušān ān ī xwēš dād ag-dēnīh rawāgēnēd was
ēwēn ī pēšēnagān wišobēnēd ud Dēn ī Mazdesnān nizārēnēd ud
nisā šōyīšnīh nisā nigānīh nisā xwarišnīh pad kard nihād ud az
bundahišn gāhān tā im rōz anāgīh az ēn garāntar nē mad čē

¹² Bailey, 56; Messina, 66.

¹³ Bailey, 56; Messina, 67; Olsson, *op. cit.*, 34.

¹⁴ For relations between the Zoroastrians and the Muslims see J. Choksy, “Zoroastrians in Muslim Iran: Selected Problems of Coexistence and Interaction during the Early Medieval Period,” *Iranian Studies*, 1987, 17-30; M. Morony, “The Conquerors and Conquered: Iran,” *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, ed. G.H.A. Juynboll, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, (1982), 73-88.

dūškunišnīh ōyšan rāy niyāz ud awērānīh ud must kunišnīh ud wad
dādīh wad dēnīh rāy sēj ud niyāz ud abārīg anāgīh mēhmān kard ēstēd

and when the rulership came to Yazdgerd (III), he ruled for 20 years, then the Arabs rushed with many numbers to Iran, Yazdgerd (III) was not able to battle them, (he) went to Xwarāsān and Turkeštān and asked for horses and men for assistance, he was killed there. The son of Yazdgerd went to India and brought an army (and) troops, and before arriving, he was killed in Xwarāsān and that army and troops were destroyed, Iran was left to the Arabs and they have made that law of evil religion current, many customs of the ancients they destroyed and the religion of the Mazdā worshipping religion was made feeble and they established the washing of the dead, burying the dead, and eating the dead. And from the primal creation of the material world till today, a heavier harm has not come, because of their evil behavior, misery and ruin and doing violence and evil law, evil religion, danger and misery and other harm has become accepted.¹⁵

This passage clearly demonstrates the socio-religious implications of the conquest, where the natives see the Arabs bringing an evil religion, followed by the process of conversion. One could also note the choice of verbs used in this context. When describing the Arab Muslim invasion, the verb commonly used is *dwānist*, meaning to “rush,” which usually is reserved for demonic creatures in the Zoroastrian tradition. This is done since they are perceived to be from the lineage of *Xēsm* (the demon of wrath). This epithet is not uniquely given to the Arab Muslims, but also to other non-Zoroastrian personages which will be seen below as well. Thus through this processes the invaders are demonized and fitted within the Zoroastrian world view. In the scheme of apocalyptic vision, according to the *Žande ī Wahman Yasn*, the next calamity is described as having been brought by people who have black clothing. This is in reference to the uprising of the *Sīyāh Jāmāgān*, the army of Abu Muslim Khurāsānī:

ēk-sad ēwēnag ud hazār ēwēnag ud bēwar ēwēnag
dēwān ī wizārd-wars ī xēsm-tōhmag az kustag ī
Xwarāsān ān ī nidom-tōhmag ō Ērān-šahr dwārēnd
ul-grift drafš hēnd syā zēn barēnd ud wars wizārd
ō pušt dārēnd ud xwurdag ud nidom-bunīg nērōg-
kār-zanišn pēšyār-wišt hēnd

one hundred kinds one thousand kinds and innumerable kinds of demons with disheveled hair, from the lineage of *Xēsm* (wrath) from the district of Khurāsān, those of low lineage will rush to Iran, they will have raised banners, will wear black armor and have hair parted on their back and will be mean and low in origin and of mighty blows and piss venom.¹⁶

¹⁵ The translation is based on the three Bundahišn manuscripts, DH, TD1, and TD2, otherwise see, B.T. Anklesaria, *Žand-Ākāsīh, Iranian or Greater Bundahišn*, (Bombay, 1956), 277-279; M. Bahār, *Bondaheš*, Tus Publishers, (Tehran, 1369), 141.

¹⁶ The translation is based on the two Zand ī Wahman Yasn manuscripts. DH, and TD2,

The color black clearly has been identified with the Abbāsī movement and propaganda and other messianic movements, although the text can be referring to several other episodes. After the death of Zayd b. 'Alī and his son in 743, the Shī'ā of Khurāsān wore black garments, and also Khidāš, who was the Abbāsī emissary, who later was accused of following the ideas of Khorram-dēns.¹⁷ More importantly, however, the black banners have been identified with the Abbāsī cause.¹⁸ Abū Muslim in 746-747 received from the imam the standard, *lawā-ye zell*, and banner, *rāyat-e sehāb*, and propagated the 'Abbāsī *dāwa*, and his followers wore black garments.¹⁹ The Middle Persian apocalyptic texts appear to refer to the coming of Abu Muslim Khurāsānī and the rise of the Abbāsī revolution when discussing the people with black banners appearing from the east.²⁰ What is interesting is the way the Zoroastrians view the rise of this Muslim folk-hero who became a legend and about whom stories were composed.²¹ In these texts, Abū Muslim's campaign is seen as a travesty, which is contrary to some notions that the non-Arab inhabitants of the plateau were pleased to see a balanced rule by the Muslim caliphate based on the equality of Arabs and non-Arabs. Contrary to the Muslim apocalyptic accounts of this event, the *Mahdī* neither came, nor did it have a positive consequence. For the Muslims, the *Mahdī* would appear after the coming of the people who wore black (Ibn Khaldūn: Vol. II, p. 184):

The black banners shall come from the east and kill you as men have never been killed before, then Allāh's caliph, the mahdī, shall come; when you see him you shall do homage to him even if you shall have to creep on the snow.²²

What is also noteworthy is the class and race consciousness of the Zoroastrian writers, i.e., calling Abū Muslim of "low origin." Not only is he thought of

otherwise see, B.T. Anklesaria, *Zandī-ī Vohūman Yasn and Two Pahlavi Fragments*, (Bombay, 1957), 17-18; and the best and latest translation, Carlo G. Cereti, *The Zand ī Wahman Yasn, A Zoroastrian Apocalypse*, Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, (Rome, 1995) chapter 4.2, 153.

¹⁷ M. Sharon, "Khidāš," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (Leiden, 1986), 1-3.

¹⁸ J. David-Weill, "Alam," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (Leiden, 1960), 349.

¹⁹ G.H. Yūsofī, "Abū Moslem 'Abd-al-Rahmān b. Moslem Korāsānī," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, (London, 1985), 341; See Amoreti, "Sects and heresies," *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 4, ed. R.N. Frye, Cambridge University Press, (Massachusetts, 1975), 513.

²⁰ Ph. Gignoux, "Nouveaux regards sur l'apocalyptique iranienne," *Académie de inscriptions & Belles-Lettres*, (Paris, Avril-Juin 1986), 339-340; "Sur l'inexistence d'un Bahman Yasht avestique," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, No. 21 (Tokyo, 1986), 59; "Apocalypses et voyages extra-terrestres dans l'iran mazdéen," *Apocalypses et voyages dans l'au-delà*, ed. C. Kappler, (Paris, 1987), 359.

²¹ I. Mélikoff, *Abū Muslim le "porte-hache" du khorassan dans la tradition épique Turco-Iranienne*, Librairie d'amérique et d'orient, (Paris, 1962).

²² H. Ringgren, "Some Religious Aspects of the Caliphate," *The Sacral Kingship*, Contributions to the Central Theme of the VIIIth International Congress for the History of Religions, (Rome, April 1955), E.J. Brill, (Leiden, 1959), 734.

“low origin” but also *bun nē paydāg*, of “unknown origin.”²³ This, of course does not help us as to the origin of this famous personage, but only indicates that the Zoroastrian writers did not care about his origin and only that he was detrimental for their community. In the Middle Persian apocalyptic texts, the Khurāsānī army is accused of burning down and destroying properties and cities and fire temples of the Zoroastrian community. The *Jāmāsp Nāmag* describes the events thus:

pas āxcēzēd andar Xwarāsān zamīg xwurdag ud abaydāg
mard-ē abāg was mardōm asp sar ī nēzag ī tēz ud šahr
pad čeragīh ō pādaxšāyīh ī xwēš kard bawēd xwad miyān ī
pādaxšāyīh awēm ud abaydāg bawēd pādaxšāyīh hamāg
az Ērānagān šawēd ō an-ērān rasēd

Then will rise in the land of Khurāsān a lowly and obscure man, with many men and horse(s) and sharp pointed spears, and he will take over and rule and make the land his own. In the midst of his rule, he will be destroyed and pass out of sight. The whole rule will pass from the Iranians to the non-Iranians.²⁴

The idea that Abū Muslim may be of Iranian origin is suggested in these texts because it is stated that he will come to *pādaxšāyīh*, “rule” or “sovereignty,” and that this *pādaxšāyīh* will then pass on to non-Iranians. We should also take into consideration another possibility in regard to the ethnicity of the supporters of the revolt against the Marwānīs. While it is known that the Abbāsīs wore black as opposed to the Umayyids who wore white, this tradition does not precede the Abbāsī caliphate and may be Abbāsī propaganda.²⁵ Further, there is little evidence that the Abbāsīs had black banners themselves. H. Ringgren has voiced another possibility, based on G. Widengren’s suggestion, that the color black represents the Iranian peasantry and that of the Männerbund, or “men’s society,” and the banner was connected to the ideology of the Männerbund. According to Abu Hanīfah al-Dīnawarī, those who had gathered around Abū Muslim were dressed in black and carrying *kāfir-kūhāts*, i.e., “clubs” for slaying the unbelievers which was characteristic of the Iranian society.²⁶ We should take note, however, that while it is true that in the traditional Indo-European society, black represented the color of the peasantry, in Iran the color blue was connected with the peasantry.²⁷

In the later Persian Zoroastrian texts of the medieval period, Abū Muslim

²³ *Zand ī Wahman yašt*, Chapter 4.5-8, 153.

²⁴ Bailey, “To The Zamasp-Namak. II,” *Bulletin of the Society of the Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. VI (1930), 581; Messina, *op. cit.*, 70.

²⁵ H. Ringgren, *op. cit.*, 743-744.

²⁶ H. Ringgren, *op. cit.*, 744.

²⁷ G. Dumézil, *L'idéologie tripartite des Indo-Européens*, (Bruxelles, 1958), 26; L. Gerschel, “Couleur et teinture chez divers peuples indo-européens,” *Annales*, Mai-Juin (Paris, 1966), 631.

is also detested and given a demonic lineage. In the *Žardušt Nāme*, Abū Muslim is given the following characteristics (1346-1347):

bowad pādešāhī-ye ān dēw kēn ka dēn ī behī rā zanad bar zamin
siyah jāme dārand darwēš u tang jahān karde az xēš bē nām u nang

It will be rulership of that wrathful demon, who strikes down the good religion; they have black clothing and are poor and weak, they have made the world nameless and low.

What the Middle Persian texts reveal is that we must abandon the idea regarding the connection between Abū Muslim and Zoroastrianism. Although Yūsufī does not subscribe to such a belief, he has stated that this idea has been encouraged by the fact that Abū Muslim crushed Zoroastrian sectarian movements, such as those of Behāfrīd, thus he must have been beneficial for the “orthodox” Zoroastrianism.²⁸ Whatever we may think of Abū Muslim’s relation with the non-Arab population, what was important for the Zoroastrian community was the non-Zoroastrianess of Abū Muslim and so the dangers that he may pose to that community.

The third apocalyptic episode under discussion has to do with a sectarian or heretical movement, namely that of Bābak Khorram-dēn and his followers. It has been assumed that “The Khorramiyya represented Persian national sentiments looking forward to a restoration of Persian sovereign rule in contrast to the universalist religious tendencies of Manichaeism.”²⁹ But for the Persian community what Bābak and his movement meant is a different question, since by then religious communal identity had become the main mode of one’s identification. Spuler was correct in stating that while there may have been national and social undercurrents, the indigenous sources are silent about this assumption of the restoration of Persian sovereignty.³⁰ The Middle Persian apocalyptic sources make clear of the danger of Bābak and take a dim view of the Khorramiyya. The ninth century encyclopedic text, the *Bundahišn* (Chapter XXXIII 23-24) states:

pad dēn gowēd kū dūš-pādaxšāyīh oyšān sar
kāmed būdān grōh-ē āyand suxr nišān suxr
drafš ud Pārs rōstāgīhā ī Ērān-šahr tā ō Bābīl
gīrand oyšān tāzīgān nīzār kunand

In the religion it is said that their evil rule will come to an end. A group will come, with red signs, red banners and will capture from Fārs (and) the districts of Iran to Babylon. They will weaken the Arabs.

²⁸ Yūsufī, *op. cit.*, 343.

²⁹ W. Madlung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, ed. E. Yarshater, No. 4, (Costa Mesa, 1988), 2.

³⁰ B. Spuler, *The Age of the Caliphs*, (Princeton, 1995), 55.

Here we have an army which has been identified as non Arab, i.e., Iranian which will kill the Tāzīgān i.e., Muslims.³¹ Even this act was not perceived as contributing to the cause of the Zoroastrian community. It is clear that heresy was deemed dangerous and so it can not be looked upon as anything positive, even though the communities adversaries were being annihilated. But what the apocalyptic Middle Persian texts can tell us is in regard to specific events which can demonstrate the intensity of certain episodes in the medieval period. The Middle Persian apocalyptic text, the *Žand ī Wahman Yasn*, also gives an account of the Khorramiyya,³² which appears very much the same as the above report of the *Bundahišn*. This report, however, is actually different from that of the *Bundahišn*, which has not been noticed before, and as the result of confusion over the substance of the text a disagreement has arisen. In this episode, in the *Žand Wahman Yasn* the Khorramiyya are grouped with the Byzantines and are considered to be from the lineage of the demon *Xšm* (Chapter VI 3-5):

pas az nišanag ī syā pādixšāyih ō awēšān xešm-tōhmagān
 az sarmān dehān druž ī šcāsp [ī] kilisāyīg (hād Māhwindād
 guft kū Hrōmāyīg bawēnd ud rōšan guft kū suxr kulāh ud
 suxr zēn ud suxr drafš bawēnd hād ka daxšag ī awēšān bawēd . . .)
 ēk sadgānag ud ēk hazārgānag ud bēwargānag bawēnd druž ī
 šcāsp [ī] kilisāyīg drafš ī suxr dārēnd ušān rawišn was tāzēnd
 ō ēn Ērān dehān ī man Ohrmazd dād tā Arang bār (hād būd kē frāt
 rōd guft) tā ō Yōnān ī Asūrestān mānišn (hād Yōnān saxt-āmār uš
 asūriḡ mānišnih ēd kū mardōm ī Asūriḡ padīš mānēnd) ud ān ī
 awēšān nišenag) (hād būd kē gilistag ī dēwān guft).

after the black sign rulership will go to those of the seed of Xšm (that is, Māhwindād said that they will be Hrōmāyīg and Rōšan said that they will have red caps, red armor and red banners. That is when it will be their sign) . . . a hundred, a thousand, a myriad will be the demons of Šcāsp ī Kilisāyīg, they will have red banners and movement they will pour in great numbers into these Iranian lands which I, Ohrmazd have created up to the banks of the Arang (that is, there was one who said, "River Frāt") as far

³¹ H.H. Schaeder's hypothesis is still the best explanation for the origin of the word. According to him Middle Persian Tāzīg is based on the name of the Arab tribe of Taiyī, "Türkische Namen der Iranier," *Die Welt des Islam*, (Berlin, 1941), 1-32; J. Tavadia review of P.B. Vachh: Firdousi and the Shahnama, A Study of the Great Persian Epic of the Homer of the East, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Band 102, Heft 2, (1952), 384; For a review of the different hypotheses regarding Tāzīg see the excellent article by W. Sundermann, "An Early Attestation of the Name of the Tajiks," *Medioiranica, Proceedings of the International Colloquium organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 21th to the 23 of May 1990*, eds. W. Skalmowski & A. Van Tongerlo, Uitgeverij Peeters, (Leuven, 1993), 163-172.

³² Ph. Gignoux, "Nouveaux regards sur l'apocalyptique iranienne," *Académie de inscriptions & Belles Lettres*, Avril-Juin (Paris, 1986), 340; "Sur l'inexistence d'un Bahman Yasht avestique," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, No. 32, (Tokyo, 1986), 61; "Apocalypses et voyages extra-terrestres dans l'iran mazdéen," *Apocalypses et voyages dans l'au-delà*, ed. C. Kappler, (Paris, 1987), 359-360.

as the Greeks dwelling in Asūrestān (that is the Greeks who are hard to count, its nature of being the residence of the Asūrīg is explained by the fact that Asūrīg men dwell in it) and to their residence (that is there is one who said "The dwelling of the dēws").³³

Gignoux had identified the wearers of the red caps and red banners in this episode as the followers of Bābak Khorram-dēn and their revolt. The problem is that the evidence demonstrates that they wear red caps and hold a red banner, but are moving from the West, i.e., Byzantium. Cereti, in his translation of the *Ẓand ī Wahman Yasn* did not accept Gignoux's suggestion, exactly based on this point. He also questioned Gignoux's assumption based on epithet of *kiltšāyīg* "Christian," of these people which he thought did not match with Bābak and his followers. Thus Cereti exclaimed that they could not be the Khorramiyya and that the text was describing the Byzantines.³⁴ The text clearly states that these men were coming from the west, and came up to the Euphrates river. The text uses *sarmān dehān*, Avestan *sairinam dahyunam*, Greek *sarames* for their location. In the Iranian tradition, Salm, the eldest son Faraidūn, was given the region of Rome to rule (Pahlavi Texts 25.5):

az frazandān ī Frēdōn Salm kē kišwar ī Hrōm
ud Tūč kē Turkestān pad xwadāyīh dāšt Ērij
Ērān dahibed būd uš be ōzad

From the offspring's of Frēdūn, Salm who (ruled) the land of Rome and Tūč who ruled Turkestān, they killed Ērij who was the ruler of Iran.³⁵

In the *Bundahišn* there is a gloss which states *sarm deh ast hrōm* "the country of Sarm is Rome."³⁶ The thirteenth century Zoroastrian Persian text, the *Ẓardušt-nāme* also confirms the story that these people were known as wearing red and coming from the West (ZN 94.1448):

bedāngah bēyāyad sepāhī ze rūm bad andēš u bad fe'l u nāpāk u šūm
abā jāme surx u bā surx zēn yekāyek be kerdār dēw la'ēn

then an army will come from Rome, with bad thoughts, bad deeds, unclean and sinister, their clothing red and with red armor each one acts like the damned demon.

Gignoux believed that since this group advanced to Mesopotamia and were in the Iranian plateau, they should be identified as the Khorramiyya because this is precisely their geographical limit.³⁷ Now we can reject this assumption,

³³ Anklesaria, *op. cit.*, 45-47; Cereti, *op. cit.*, 160.

³⁴ Cereti, *ibid.*, 199.

³⁵ T. Daryace, "Šcgafty wa barjestegy-ye Sīstān: Matni be zabān-e Pahlavī (The Wonders and Worthiness of Sīstān: A Pahlavi Text)," *Iranshenasi*, Vol. VIII, No. 3, (1996), 536 & 542.

³⁶ TD1 43v.9; TD2 106.15; DH 188v.

³⁷ Ph. Gignoux, *Sur l'inexistence*, 61; *Nouveau regard*, 340.

since it has been made clear through the Middle Persian and New Persian texts that the direction of the movement of these men was from the West, i.e., Byzantium to the East. This certainly was not the traditional location of the Khorramiyya's activity. Cereti's rejection of Gignoux's identification of these men with the Khorramiyya should also be questioned, since the color red was the color of that group, and the historical texts support this fact.³⁸

We can find the answer to this puzzle in the Muslim accounts of the ninth century. Al-Ṭabarī tells us that when the Caliph's forces had put Bābak on the defensive in year 837-838 A.D., Bābak had written a letter to Theophilus, the Byzantine emperor, in which he had instigated the emperor to invade the caliphate, and so the emperor with one hundred thousand men had reached Zibaṭrah in Syria. Within his army he had a group of *muḥammirah* who had revolted in the Jibāl and then had joined the emperor after Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Mus'ab had fought with them.³⁹ This is quite possibly the origin of the *Ẓand ī Wahman Yasn*'s account, since al-Ṭabarī also confirms the fact that there were a large number of Khorramiyya in al-Jibāl (Māh) who had come together in Hamadān. The Caliph al-Mu'tasim had sent Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Mus'ab, the new governor of al-Jibāl in 833-834 to battle them. The Khorramiyya had been defeated and some sixty thousand of them killed, the rest had fled to Byzantium.⁴⁰ Mas'ūdī in recounting the Byzantine emperors, mentions Theophilus as the forty third emperor and the one who had taken Zibaṭrah, the famous city and fortress. This historian tells us that it was Afshīn, the famous general, who had confronted Theophilus and that the Khorramiyya who were in Theophilus' entourage had kept him safe from total defeat. He states the number of the *muḥammirah* were in the thousands.⁴¹

The gloss in the *Ẓand ī Wahman Yasn* may suggest that the text is referring to this battle in the ninth century. The gloss indicates the importance of that location, *hād būd kē Frāt rōd guft* "there was one who said, (up to) the river Furāt/Euphrates." The city of Zibaṭrah is located at the head of the Euphrates river or known as *Furat al-Šam* in Syria.⁴² The Khorram-dēn's demonization is no surprise since they were connected with the Mazdakites who did not represent the "high church of orthodox Zoroastrianism" but the Low Church, and were the popular religious tradition.⁴³ The Byzantine and the Khorramiyya

³⁸ G.H. Sadighi, *Les mouvements religieux iraniens au II^{ème} et au III^{ème} siècles de l'hégire*, (Paris, 1938), 108; B. Scarcia Amoretti, "Sects and Heresies," *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. IV, ed. R.N. Frye, (Cambridge, 1975), 514.

³⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk*, The Events of Year 223, (New York, 1991), 95.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, The Events of the Year 218, 3.

⁴¹ *Kitāb al-tanbīh wa-al-ishrāf*, (Tehran, 1986), 152-153.

⁴² Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, (Tehran, 1985), 128-129.

⁴³ Madelung, *op. cit.*, 2.

invasion of the Caliphate seems to have made such an important impression on the population of the Near East that the news traveled quickly and caused havoc. The Persian version of the *Wahman Yasn* gives the location of the confrontation at the banks of the river Euphrates as well.⁴⁴ The battle seems to have been so bloody that it became a well known episode in history: "So many men and animals will be killed that the girths of the horses will be besmeared with the blood of men. The river Euphrates will turn red and the cloud will take up this (red) water and carry it to the sky, and it will rain red hail in the world."⁴⁵

The Zoroastrian priests in Fārs inserted this episode in the text, feeling the eminent danger. What seemed apocalyptic in scope was inserted in the texts, and the battle at Zibaṭraḥ seems to have had apocalyptic proportions. This is confirmed by Muslim attestation of the horror that followed the battle afterwards where by the order of the Byzantine emperor, Muslim men were blinded with hot iron and their ears and noses were cut off.⁴⁶ It was reported that the calamity was so great that refugees came as far as Iraq and that the Caliph al-Muṭaṣim prepared for battle at once.⁴⁷ The news certainly had reached Fārs as well, where the Zoroastrian priests took this as the eminent coming of the end. While Gignoux was correct to identify them as the Khorramiyya, he misread their direction. Cereti, while correctly reading the text, came to a wrong conclusion. The Khorramiyya were much more mobile, especially after their defeat at the hands of the caliph and were devastating not only for the caliphate, but also the Zoroastrian community.

This brief review of the Middle Persian apocalyptic texts should encourage the historians of Islamic history to utilize these sources as complementary to those of the Arabic, Persian, Armenian, Syriac, and Greek sources used for insights into the psyche of a beleaguered community which was facing a tide of conversion in the ninth and the tenth centuries and had been devastated by the Arab Muslim conquest, Abū Muslim's military action, and the Khorram-dēns. The importance of these sources are that they present the Zoroastrian view as to how history was unfolding and nearing the end in the medieval period. Because they were written from a communal perspective, they can give answers or help to give answers to the many issues which preoccupy the historians of medieval Islamic history and demonstrate the reaction of other religious communities in the Near East.

⁴⁴ *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazdār Faramarz and Others*, ed. B.N. Dhabhar, (Bombay, 1932), 479.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 479.

⁴⁶ al-Ṭabarī, 93.

⁴⁷ al-Ṭabarī, 95.

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